



PA Coalition for Oral Health
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PAOralHealth.org

Members Listed below Proudly Endorse the Enclosed Policy Priorities

ACHIEVA

Brandywine Health Foundation
Carlisle Area Health & Wellness Foundation
Central Susquehanna Community Foundation
Delta Dental of Pennsylvania
DENTSPLY International
Family First Health
First Hospital Foundation
Greater Lehigh Valley Oral Health Partnership
Healthy Adams County
Healthy York County Coalition
Highmark Inc.
Jewish Healthcare Foundation
Montgomery County Health Alliance
North Penn Community Health Foundation
Pennsylvania Association of Community Health Centers
Pennsylvania Dental Association
Pennsylvania Dental Hygienists' Association
Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health
St. Christopher's Foundation for Children, Community Oral Health Initiatives
St. Joseph Health Ministries
Southeast Region Oral Health Task Force
Two Rivers Health & Wellness Foundation
United Concordia Companies, Inc.
UPB Center for Rural Health Practice

The Pennsylvania Coalition for Oral Health 2011 Policy Priorities

By the time they reach kindergarten, more than 40 percent of American children experience tooth decay. In Pennsylvania, it's even worse. A 2010 report by the Pew Center on the States that compares oral health care across all 50 states gives Pennsylvania an F.

Painful dental problems affect children's overall health and ability to focus in the classroom. They also lead to costly emergency room care. Among adults, these same oral health problems become exacerbated, resulting in lost workplace productivity. When problems become severe, they can affect an adult's ability to get a job. Children and adults with disabilities experience an even greater risk of oral health problems due to limited access to care, which can lead to serious behavioral and medical issues.

The Pennsylvania Coalition for Oral Health (PCOH) is comprised of leaders from across the state who agree that Pennsylvania must do better. Represented by schools of public health, philanthropic organizations, businesses, dental organizations, health insurance firms, advocacy organizations and other champions, PCOH's goal is to advance practices and policies that increase access to oral health services and prevention education – especially for our most vulnerable Pennsylvanians.

The Pennsylvania Coalition for Oral Health welcomes the opportunity to partner with policymakers to advance these and other policies to achieve an A+ for oral health in Pennsylvania.

We urge the Governor and Members of the General Assembly to examine the following three policy priorities that will increase access to quality oral health care and improve statewide prevention efforts.

1. Reform and Improve the Medicaid Administration and Payment of Oral Health Services

- *Regularly review and maintain provider payment rates*, focusing on routine services and good preventive care.
- *Streamline credentialing and billing processes*. Reduce the complicated web of interactions that currently exists, allowing providers and patients to navigate the system easily and cost effectively. Require state dental managed care organizations to adopt uniform and reciprocal credentialing processes or centralize the credentialing process.

2. Strengthen the State's Oral Health Workforce

- *Remove barriers that discourage oral health professionals from practicing in underserved areas and caring for underserved populations*. For example, adequately fund the Pennsylvania Primary Care Practitioners Loan Repayment Program and remove administrative barriers, allowing the Department of Health to more readily place providers in needy communities. Provide tax credits or other financial incentives for providers who open practices in health professional shortage areas or agree to serve a certain number of Medical Assistance patients.
- *Increase the ability of oral health professionals to practice in underserved areas*. We applaud state legislators for their passage of ACT 51 (2007) that redefines the role of dental hygienists and certified public health dental hygiene practitioners, allowing them to efficiently practice in a wider range of settings. We encourage efforts to ensure reimbursement for the expanded areas of practice.
- *Expand the oral health workforce to better meet the needs of underserved populations*. Look to other states for successful approaches to expanding and diversifying Pennsylvania's sector of oral health professionals (e.g., Minnesota's statewide oral health workforce planning efforts and Iowa's use of dental hygienists who serve as community health coordinators through an exemplary I-Smile dental home initiative).

3. Adopt an Integrated Approach to Preventive Oral Healthcare

- *Actively promote public water fluoridation systems throughout the state*. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that public water fluoridation saves \$16 to \$19 per person every year. Fluoride is a proven, low cost strategy to prevent disease.
- *Continue to support and expand the Department of Public Welfare's new fluoride varnish program*. We applaud the Department for its creation of this critical program, which provides funding through Medical Assistance to reimburse physicians and Certified Registered Nurse Practitioners (CRNP's) for the application of fluoride varnish to children. Fluoride varnish is proven to prevent cavities and emergency care. Legislators are urged to include this program in future state budgets, expand fluoride varnish services to older children (beyond age 5) and encourage private insurers to adopt similar programs.
- *Increase the number of dental sealant programs serving high-risk children and youth*. Federal grant opportunities to fund such programs will soon be made available to states through the passage of the 2010 Health Care Reform legislation.
- *Promote a statewide Oral Health Education Campaign that builds upon the Nation's 5-Year Oral Health Campaign, passed by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act*.
 - Promote sensible school nutrition policies that provide children with healthy beverage and snack options and restrict their access to high-sugar foods and drinks during school hours.
 - Promote the integration of oral health education in hospitals and other public institutions so that new parents learn about the importance of oral health for their children.